DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 175 115 EA 012 022

AUTHOR Gregg, P. Keith
TITLE A Model for the Preparation of Planners and Operators of Community Education Programs.
PUB DATE 16 Aug 79
NOTE 9p.: Paper presented at the National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration (33rd, Edmonton, Alberta, August 12-16, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education; *Community Education; Community Problems; *Field Experience Programs; Models; Professional Training; Program Development; Student Projects
IDENTIFIERS Chicago State University IL

ABSTRACT

This model is based on a training program at Chicago State University designed to train planners and operators of community education programs. Academic content is combined with field-based training. According to the model, first the needs of the communities of the participants should be identified. Then personnel from each agency involved should be recruited as trainees for the program. Individual preparation and training needs of each participant must be assessed. A content module for the program must be developed. This module may be based on competencies that the community education literature defines as necessary. The field-based module provides experiential activity related to the content through a community project that aims at solving a community problem. The fourth and final component of the program is a three-part evaluation component made up of ongoing content evaluation, end-of-the-year project reports, and overall program evaluations. (Author/JM)

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A Model for the Preparation of Planners and Operators of Community Education Programs

P. Keith Gregg

Prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of the National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration, conducted at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, August 16, 1979.

EA 012 022

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A MODEL FOR THE PREPARATION OF PLANNERS AND OPERATORS

OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

For the development of this paper as in the development of the program which prompted it, the following definition of community education was adopted. This definition was established by Minzey and Olsen in their contribution to a book of readings on community education (Hickey, et al. 1969).

> Community education is a process that concerns itself with everything that affects the well-being of all the citizens within a given community. This definition extends the role of community education from one of the traditional concept of teaching children to one of identifying the needs, problems and wants of the community and then assisting in the development of facilities, programs, staff and leadership toward the end of improving the entire community.

Community education is an educational concept which is expanding throughout the country. With the recent advent of federal support and the increasing number of states committed to the concept, more people are being recruited to plan and operate community education programs. Many of these individuals have little or no familiarity with the community education concept or the principles upon which it is based. The model herein described is based on the idea that in-service and pre-service preparation programs need to be designed, and is supported with some description of experience with such a program at Chicago State University (CSU).

The State of Illinois can be used as an example of potential growth in community education and the need for preparation programs to accompany this growth. In 1976, the Illinois Office of Education surveyed 292 local education agencies to determine the prevalence of community education in the state. Of these, 139 communities indicated community education programs were being administered, 17 indicated planning for the implementation of programs, and 72 were seeking additional information (Cronin, 1977). In another survey, representatives of the Cook County Education Service Region contacted 143 local education agencies in Cook County to determine the status of community education. Of 98 respondents,

45 stated that community education programs were being offered and 20 indicated an interest in the development of programs(Athas, 1975). In a recent preelection statement titled "Program for Improving Elementary and Secondary Education," Mayor Jan Byrne called for "better use . . . of physical plants where dwindling enrollments have left space available." Byrne further indicated that "park facilities can be integrated with schools so that the schools can become total community centers utilizing expanded schedules for the evening hours"(Banas, 1979). In addition, at least three community colleges in the Chicago area are offering community education programs.

As early as 1976, the need for community education preparation programs was explored in the State of Illinois. The Illinois Consortium of Colleges and Universities (composed of 11 institutions of higher learning) published a report titled Collaborative Training Programs for Community Education Leadership. The report found that only two institutions in the state were offering "philosophy, methods or survey courses in community education to impart fundamentals of the concept." In addition, the report found "that there is a critical need to bring together an identifiable body of training methods and materials for professionals, paraprofessionals, and lay personnel." Basically, the report found that there was a continuing need for the development of in-service community education preparation programs (Hazard, 1977). During the past two years, the CSU staff has confirmed this need by working with representatives from 21 local education agencies, community colleges, and other agencies who indicated that their people who plan and operate community education programs were in need of additional preparation and training.

The Illinois example represents one of 50 potential examples. CSU staff believes that other states have similar needs for the preparation of planners and operators of community education programs. These needs vary from state to state, and, indeed from community to community. It is the intent of this paper to pro-

pose a model for the preparation of planners and operators of community education programs which may be useful to other institutions which may become involved in this preparation.

In describing the needs assessment component of the program and model the usual purpose for needs assessment was involved. Any training program should be based on identified needs existing in those communities identified as involved in or interested in becoming involved in community education, and interested in preparation and training for their personnel. No instrument was used for this purpose in the CSU program, however, such use is not precluded by this model. Needs can be determined (and such was the case in the CSU program) through personal interviews with community residents, particularly people in leadership positions of agencies or organizations. These contacts can be designed to result in the definition of needs and may include general statements related to community involvement, utilization of public facilities, extension of educational services, identification and utilization of community resources and talents, interagency cooperative agreements, programs for special clients (handicapped, senior citizens, etc.), evaluation of programs, and resources available from outside the community.

The second component, recruitment of personnel, can be set up during the interview with community agency people. An effort can be made to determine which individuals from the agency might best serve the interests of the concept of community education as well as the agency through the process of training. The community's needs would appear to best served if a team of people representing several agencies or organizations within the community were to participate in the preparation and training program. In the CSU program, recruiting activities were pointed in this direction with some success, although school people tended to make up the majority of trainees. The team approach can enable the participants to offer mutual support to one another as they work toward development of community education in their particular community. Diversity of agency representation on

the team further strengthens this effort as it deals with agency "turf" problems endemic to nearly every community.

In the third or preparation component of the program, a basis for such preparation can be included during the interview or original field contact phase described earlier. The specific preparation needs of individuals to be involved can be determined either at this time or during the first training session. The CSU program found the first training session more convenient and individual preparation and training needs were assessed at this time.

Since bringing those people being trained together for certain activities seemed to have value for reasons of (1) fairly similar training needs (for some) and (2) interaction generally, it appears worthwhile to develop a program which contains both a content module (for group work) and a field-based module.

The content module could be based upon some particular reference (s) from the literature and research in community education. In the instance of the CSU program, the content module was developed from the competencies defined in the Report of the Project to Assess Needed Competencies in Community Education: 1976-77 (Miller, 1977). The following areas of preparation were established within the content module of the CSU program based on the report described and local training needs:

1. Philosophy and Goals of Community Education
2. Human Relations
3. Community Participation, Involvement, and Resources
4. Communication
5. Program Planning, Development, and Implementation
6. Staffing and the Recruitment of Clients
7. Budget and Finance
8. Research and Evaluation

Those people being prepared or trained may be involved in the various areas of the content module according to need. This is in line with a basic objective of individualizing. Since most participants will probably be employed, content areas might be offered at a time most convenient for the participants. The CSU program was offered one Saturday each month for nine months. In the program, day-long sessions allowed for the opportunity to explore a content area in some depth. Participants were involved in individual work, experiential activities, receiving lecturettes, group discussions, and interaction, etc. Through this format, the participants had many opportunities to share experiences and to learn from each other.

The field-based module can provide the primary experiential activity which is related to content. In addition, it can, particularly through the team concept described earlier, help establish the community education program more extensively in the community. The team of participants can develop a project which may involve one or several of the conceptual notions provided in areas of preparation noted previously. The project may be developed on a basis which presents the opportunity for the integration of principles and practices of community education and provides an experience for defining a community problem, determining possible solution(s), and implementing a program with such solution (s) as the objective (s). The greater the involvement of community residents and agencies the richer the experience can be. In the CSU program, each team first developed a written proposal of the project which summarized project goals, activities, and evaluation techniques. The CSU program coordinator was involved with the team in the development and implementation of each project. She made monthly visits to the involved communities and consulted with each team at the monthly content sessions. The general objective was to tie the field-based module to the content module in such a way that the participants received the most benefit possible from the total experience.

The fourth and final component deals with evaluation. The general evaluation design may be comprised of three elements. The first is an ongoing evaluation of the content module so as to maintain the kind of flexibility which allows the participants to obtain the content they need. In the CSU program, this was accomplished through the use of an instrument especially designed for this purpose. This short instrument was administered to participants at the end of each monthly session and planning for the following session was based to some degree on the results. The second can be end-of-the-year reports from each team on their projects. Such reports would summarize the goals, activities and any student evaluation of the results. In the CSU program, the teams shared these reports as a part of the year's final session. Finally, and more generally, as done at CSU an evaluation of the overall training project might be obtained both by participants' completion of a written instrument designed for this purpose and by their verbally sharing their perceptions. From the written instrument, information about such items as the achievement of program goals and changes in participants' competency levels can be sought. In the verbal session, assessment information can be acquired about such things as individual and community attitudinal changes, program strengths and weaknesses, and the successful wedding of theory and practice.

It has been the purpose of this paper to describe a model for the preparation of planners and operators of community education programs. This model has been developed on the basis of CSU's experiences with such a program. Some of these experiences have been described in an effort to supplement the notions developed through the model. Further, the intent here has been to provide a model which incorporates individual and community training needs and which may be useful for others interested in developing similar programs.

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